Alberta

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF THE FIRST
SESSION OF THE 21ST LEGISLATURE OF
THE PROVINCE OF ALBERTA ON
THURSDAY, JUNE 12, 1986.

THE HONOURABLE W. HELEN HUNLEY
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR, PROVINCE OF ALBERTA

MR. SPEAKER AND MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY:

I have the honour to welcome you to the First Session of the Twenty-first Legislature of the Province of Alberta.

PRIORITIES

My government's legislative and budgetary policy for this Session of the Legislative Assembly will include all the priorities and programs set out at the opening of the Fourth Session of the Twentieth Legislature on April 3rd, 1986. My government will move quickly to fulfill commitments in agriculture, energy, employment initiatives, senior citizen programs and other areas of importance to Albertans.

These priorities have recently been strongly supported by the citizens of Alberta. My government is sensitive to the responsibilities contained in its new mandate and will work closely together with Albertans during the years ahead. Challenges will be met — opportunities will be seized — and the great potential of this wonderful province will be realized.

My government shares the concerns of Albertans as we face difficult times together. Our basic industries have been hit by national and international economic circumstances and, as a result, the opportunities for advancement and prosperity are, for a time, more limited than before. My government also shares the basic optimism of Albertans who have achieved so much by commitment to hard work and individual initiative. Unemployment has a direct effect upon many of our people, bringing hardship and anxiety to individuals and families. The challenge for all of us now is to continue to use our basic strengths to progress in spite of adversity. My government proposes a balanced approach which will advance rights and equality, maintain excellent support programs for our citizens in need, respond with sensitivity to concerns of individuals, families and volunteer groups, and continue to broaden our economic base at the same time as assisting our key agricultural, energy and small business sectors.

AGRICULTURE

The Alberta Farm Credit Stability Program, announced on April 3, 1986, will provide $2 billion in fixed rate financing with up to $200,000 per farm family unit. Loan application forms are now being printed and will be ready for processing at participating financial institutions very soon. The program will be as broad as possible in its scope based on repayment ability and available security. With this new financing, farmers and ranchers in Alberta will have both the stability of fixed interest rates and among the lowest input costs in North America.

My government has established a changed, more efficient organization of the departments of government. Agriculture, which is my government's number one priority is an important part of these changes. The new Associate Minister of Agriculture will be responsible for the Alberta Hail and Crop Insurance Corporation, the Surface Rights Board, the Weather Modification Advisory Committee and will be responsible for the review of the role and mandate of the Alberta Agricultural Development Corporation.

Farmers will be fully consulted in respect to changes to be made in the Corporation and in hail and crop insurance programs.

The hail and crop insurance review will be the most comprehensive of its kind since the programs were introduced in the 1960s. My government will provide a range of options for producers in insurance protection from damage caused by weather and other hazards affecting crops. Recommendations are anticipated during 1986.

My government is changing the funding formula for drainage and erosion control projects undertaken under the Alberta Water Resources Grant Program. The increased funding, providing 86% provincial support, will improve rural water management and will increase our agricultural land base.

SENIOR CITIZENS

The Seniors' Home Improvement Program Extension will take effect July 1, 1986 to December 31, 1989. This extension will provide benefits to seniors with total annual incomes under $23,000 who have not yet received assistance through the existing Seniors' Home Improvement Program.

Affordable Senior Citizen housing remains a priority of my government. Over 500 new units are scheduled for construction this year.

JOBS FOR ALBERTANS

My government recognizes the increasing need for job creation and will continue its commitment to employment support and training initiatives now underway including Youth programs. In addition, other training strategies will be developed to promote increased participation by women in Training and Development Opportunities. My government recognizes the special employment needs of women and will develop choices for women through the provision of information, counselling and workshops. My government will propose legislation to the Assembly to change the name of the Manpower Department to the Department of Career Development and Employment, reflecting new initiatives and priorities in the important areas of training and employment.

Diversification of Alberta's economic base remains a priority of my government. New economic opportunities and new industries are encouraged. The magnesium plant to be built in southern Alberta and the chemi-thermo-mechanical Whitecourt pulp mill are both world scale investments. The pulp mill will be the largest of its type anywhere. Using a mixture of Alberta woods, producing products which are new to the Alberta manufacturing scene, some 90% of the plant's production is estimated to be for export. Work on the magnesium plant is scheduled to begin late this year. Both projects are scheduled for start-up in 1988.

Our economic base is broadening year by year. Sulphur and forest products are now important elements of our resource base. The petrochemical, electronics and metal fabricating industries have emerged as strong components of our manufacturing sector. A highly developed service industry involving tourism, high technology and engineering add more economic strength. These newer initiatives will provide important

opportunities and new jobs for Albertans. The departments of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife; Tourism; and Technology, Research and Telecommunications, established earlier this year, are all actively involved with the private sector in stimulation of job creating activity in Alberta's economy.

A further important step in my government's program to stimulate job creating activity is the Alberta Small Business Term Assistance Plan. Small business accounts for over 70% of new jobs created and the new plan will provide much greater stability to the small business community for those businesses having majority ownership by Alberta residents and deriving at least 50% of income from active business sources.

The $750 million program will provide eligible small businesses with a fixed interest rate of 9% for term financing up to $150,000 over a period of 10 years. Loan application forms for the program, which will significantly assist small business growth and development in Alberta, will be ready for processing through recognized financial institutions at the earliest possible date this summer.

The Small Business Equity Corporations Program and the Alberta Stock Savings Plan are further important initiatives to improve the viability of small business and to encourage equity capital investments in this province.

Small business is a major force in the development and growth of export markets. Many small Alberta manufacturing firms are now exporting products to other Canadian provinces and to other countries. Assistance is provided to exporters through the Alberta Loan Guarantee Program and the Export Services Support Program. With loan guarantees and improving productivity and technology, Alberta businesses, working with government, will improve their competitiveness in export sales world-wide.

More jobs will also be created by my government's five year program to extend universal private line service to all rural telephone subscribers. Under the program, 100,000 party line customers will have access to private lines. This program, at a cost of about $500 million will involve the upgrading of approximately 300 telephone exchanges throughout Alberta with digital equipment. This will not only allow for the connection to new private line service for present party line customers, it will permit improved services for those living in towns and villages.

My government will ensure that Alberta's goals and objectives with respect to trade liberalization are effectively addressed in the pending Canada/United States and multilateral trade negotiations.

ENERGY

My government is committed to the long term strength of our energy industry and to support its short and medium term economic viability during this present difficult period of uncertainty in international crude oil pricing.

In spite of pricing uncertainties in oil and gas markets, the longer term prospects for our energy sector remain strongly positive. Albertans have established the reserves and the productive capacity in petroleum and natural gas and my government, working closely with industry, has developed

programs aimed at bolstering investor confidence and exploration activity through a period of price and market uncertainty.

New, shared industry/government programs, should result in more than $500 million of short term stimulation to the vital drilling, well service and geophysical industries. These programs will materially assist in creating activity and supporting employment through the summer and fall months.

The Development Drilling Assistance Program is designed to encourage drilling activities and includes a well completion component.

Approximately 40 per cent of drilling costs, up to a maximum of $200,000 per well by way of grants or transferable credits against royalities will be available up to a maximum under the program of $100 million. The drilling component will be paid when drilling has been completed on the well and the well completion component will be paid when the well is completed and is capable of commencing production.

The Well Servicing Assistance Program will help maintain employment in the well service sector. The program will provide 50 per cent reimbursement by way of cash grants up to certain limits for contract labour costs incurred on or before September 30, 1986, for the maintenance and service of eligible wells, pipelines and batteries.

The Geophysical Assistance Program will provide a portion of the cost of field expenses incurred on or before December 31, 1986, for reflection seismic work on Crown lands and on lands not more than 1.7 km from Crown lands.

Oil sands and heavy oil developments are vital, not only for Canada's long term energy supply, but today in Alberta because of the capacity of these projects to provide employment in engineering and in the construction trades. Under a federal/provincial/industry funding arrangement, engineering work is proceeding for the proposed Husky upgrader near Lloydminster.

My government has also reached a funding agreement with the owners of the Syncrude Project to allow continuation of the basic engineering and planning for the major proposed expansion of that project. Preparatory work for the expansion is estimated to cost $85 million. It will take some 2½ years to complete and will allow the planning for the expansion to continue on the original schedule. By acting now in this way, it is also an investment in the long term by providing for the continued growth of expertise in oil sands development in Alberta.

Suncor is also being helped by an adjustment to royalties on the production from its oil sands plant at Fort McMurray. This is in recognition of the financial difficulties the company is experiencing as a result of low oil prices and will help to retain Suncor as a viable employer within the Alberta economy.

COMMITMENT TO ALBERTA WOMEN

As soon as the necessary legislation has come into force, appointments to fill all positions on the Advisory Council on Women's Issues will proceed. A balance of views from across the province will be assured because of the large number of nominations received from interested Albertans.

A government-wide plan of action to provide a framework and direction for enhancing women's equality will be developed. The strategy will focus on employment, education, participation in public life and on social services and health.

My government will also be participating in two federal/provincial/territorial working groups. One will focus on the needs and concerns of Native women and the other on the particular issues affecting immigrant and visible minority women.

My government is committed to equality for women and will actively promote the full and equal participation of Alberta women in the life of the province. The November 1986 First Ministers' Conference will have as a major priority, developing methods to improve the representation of women in training and retraining programs.

PUBLIC LANDS

The grazing lease conversion policy, introduced several months ago, is consistent with my government's high priority for agriculture. The policy allows leaseholders to use arable land for more productive agricultural purposes. Leased lands, which are suitable for cultivation, may be converted at market value, provided that they are not environmentally sensitive. Agricultural lands in the Green Area will not be sold unless the integrated resource plans identify agricultural use as a priority. This will ensure that environmentally sensitive lands are not being encroached upon.

Further approvals of conversions in the southern and central administrative regions will be frozen until full public input has been received and any expressed concerns adequately reviewed. In this way, the policy will be sensitive to Albertans' needs, effective, well understood and broadly supported.

My government also will expand the highly successful "Use Respect" Program. This is a program involving 4H clubs visiting farming and ranching communities to encourage owners to provide reasonable access to their private and leased lands. It is hoped that over 25,000 farm and ranch homes will be visited between June and October of this year.

HEALTH CARE

My government has developed and is committed to the further improvement of one of the best health care systems anywhere in the world. To serve Albertans even better, the University of Alberta's Walter C. MacKenzie Health Sciences Centre has now been designated as Western Canada's first heart and heart/lung transplant centre.

The University of Alberta Hospitals undertook a successful heart and heart/lung transplant pilot program in 1985. The three cases in the pilot program represented a first for Alberta and Western Canada.

The concept of the Walter C. MacKenzie Health Sciences Centre is for Albertans to have a world class teaching, research and treatment centre. The implementation of the heart and heart/lung program is a fulfillment of

this concept, particularly in the areas of comprehensive cardiology and cardiovascular surgery.

COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL PROGRAMS

My government's commitment to a broad range of social programs to assist Albertans who have personal needs is emphasized by the expanded home care program announced in April this year. Close to 25,000 Albertans benefit from this program annually.

Funding will increase by 18%, and this increase will allow more Albertans to receive health care and home making services in their homes. Living independently in the familiar surroundings of one's home contributes to a sense of selfworth and good health.

Home care programs provide a range of services in the home, including nursing rehabilitation therapy, personal care, home-making, home-help, Meals-on-Wheels, and friendly visiting.

In addition to senior citizens, the program serves persons who are terminally ill, those discharged early from hospital and persons under 65 who are chronically ill or disabled.

Funding for women's shelters will be increased by 40% to a total of $3.5 million. These funds, to be provided to women's shelter organizations, in addition to the valuable volunteer support that many communities provide, will ensure that resources are available to respond to the concern of family violence.

Food banks in Edmonton and Calgary are co-operating with my government in a current assessment and review of the scope and future role of food banks. By such consultation, a new, careful definition of the respective roles of government social services and volunteer agencies which serve in this way, will be possible.

The new Department of Community and Occupational Health will have a preventive health focus with responsibility for community, occupational and mental health in addition to the Alberta Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Commission and the Workers' Compensation Board.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Alberta is the first province to sign the new Federal/Provincial Global Funding Agreement for low income housing. Under the agreement, the federal government will pay 70% and the province 30% of the subsidy costs for future low income housing projects. Over 700 units are planned in the current fiscal year.

HELP FOR MUNICIPALITIES

My government is responding positively to recommendations made by the Municipal Grant Structures Review Committee. By increasing unconditional grants on a yearly per capita basis over the next 8 years, Alberta's 364 municipalities will receive some $500 million in additional

provincial funding. The opportunity for municipal governments to create employment at the same time as proceeding with needed local projects will benefit may Albertans.

A full review of labour legislation will be undertaken by my government and necessary amendments will be proposed to assure that the laws of the Province, for the present and for the future, will be responsive to the needs and aspirations of employers and employees.

Legislation will be introduced to implement the Alberta Stock Saving Plan, to amend the Municipal Taxation Act and new proposals will be made in respect to local authorities elections, employment pensions, the Women's Secretariat, mental health and to implement the Hague Convention on the civil aspects of international child abduction.

Members of the Legislative Assembly: in due course you will be presented with the budget estimates. You will be asked to grant the necessary funds for the operating services and expenditures authorized by the Legislature and to endorse a program of capital financing for the Government of Alberta.

I leave you now to the business of the Session, with full confidence that, as elected representatives, your debates and your votes will reflect your understanding of the public interests of all people of Alberta.

I pray for your wisdom and strength in your deliberations.